

3.10 Growth and Development

Students differ from each other in temperament, abilities, achievements, maturity, styles of learning and in many other ways. However, they share a common journey towards maturity, passing through recognisable levels of growth.



The developmental levels from early childhood to late adolescence approximately coincide with the six levels around which the general curriculum is organised in Victoria.

At each level, individual development results from the interplay of maturation and experience, occurring in the context of a particular family, society and culture.

Descriptions of typical characteristics of learners in the different levels can often stimulate identification of desirable teaching practice. Such descriptions are provided in the resource booklets – *Support Documentation for Teachers and Parents* – and are summarised here.

Level 1 & 2 (P - Grade 2)

In this period of early childhood, children typically approach the world with a sense of natural curiosity and wonder. They have an enthusiasm for fantasy and play; in fact, play and interaction with others provide dominant forms of learning. Learning in general occurs through direct experience and any abstract ideas must be presented in the context of concrete experience.



Level 3 (Grades 3 & 4)

Again, the dominant form of learning is hands-on experience: collecting, matching, contrasting, grouping, predicting, drawing conclusions. Language, a great tool of learning, now displays greater variation in vocabulary and syntax. There is growing interest in what is literally true (as distinct from 'just a story'). While some children see rules as unchangeable and established at the whim of adults, a growing proportion sees reciprocal fairness as a core moral principle.

Level 4 (Grades 5 & 6)

These children may be less spontaneous but are generally more self-motivated and capable of absorbing considerable information. More sophisticated reasoning gives them greater understanding of consequences and a greater capacity for using talk to justify assertions and opinions. The physical and emotional developments of puberty create new challenges and opportunities. Values and judgements are now more strongly influenced by peers, and self-esteem is partly determined by mastery of tasks.

A Guiding Imperative: Respect for the Individual Person

The students in Catholic schools do not comprise an homogeneous group. They exhibit rich diversity in terms of their most pressing individual needs, their cultural, social and economic backgrounds, their personal qualities, their level of development and the experiences they have encountered in life. They are also from a range of religious and cultural backgrounds, are at different levels of religious development and have various levels of faith commitment.

Christians are called to respect the dignity and uniqueness of each person. The gospel imperative directs attention to the just claims of those in need of support, including those who are disadvantaged by societal prejudice and a deficiency in financial or other resources, as well as those with language, learning or developmental difficulties.

In response to this, the Catholic school seeks to develop a culture and an overall curriculum that will cater for individual differences and build the self-esteem of all its students in an environment free from discrimination, coercion and suspicion.



This commitment is particularly appropriate in Religious Education programs. The Religious Education classroom aims to be genuinely inclusive, responsive to the needs of learners, and employ a wide range of teaching and learning strategies so that all students might participate with a heightened sense of worth and achievement.

This is especially relevant to students of English as a Second Language (ESL) and students in Special Education programs and to those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background.

General Implications

- Religious Education must work in harmony with the normal maturing processes of the individual.
- Students need help in developing intellectual frameworks by means of which they reflect on experience, and search for personal meaning. The Catholic vision offers such an intellectual, ethical and spiritual framework.
- Discussion, story-telling, rituals, symbols and the imagination are indispensable elements of meaning-making and, therefore, of Religious Education.
- The peer group exercises powerful influence and can be effectively utilised in Religious Education by means of discussion, collaboration, planning and practical activity. Attitudes of respect, integrity and courage are fostered.
- The aims of Religious Education cannot be separated from the overall academic program which seeks to develop such truth-seeking skills as reflection, critical thinking, problem solving, analysis and discernment.
- There is need for sensitive awareness of the particular challenges experienced by students at every level of development and of their need for acceptance, patience and tolerance.
- School policies that serve students with special needs should include reference to Religious Education.
- Teachers who have a specific responsibility for students with special needs should, where appropriate, be drawn into collaboration by Religious Education teachers.